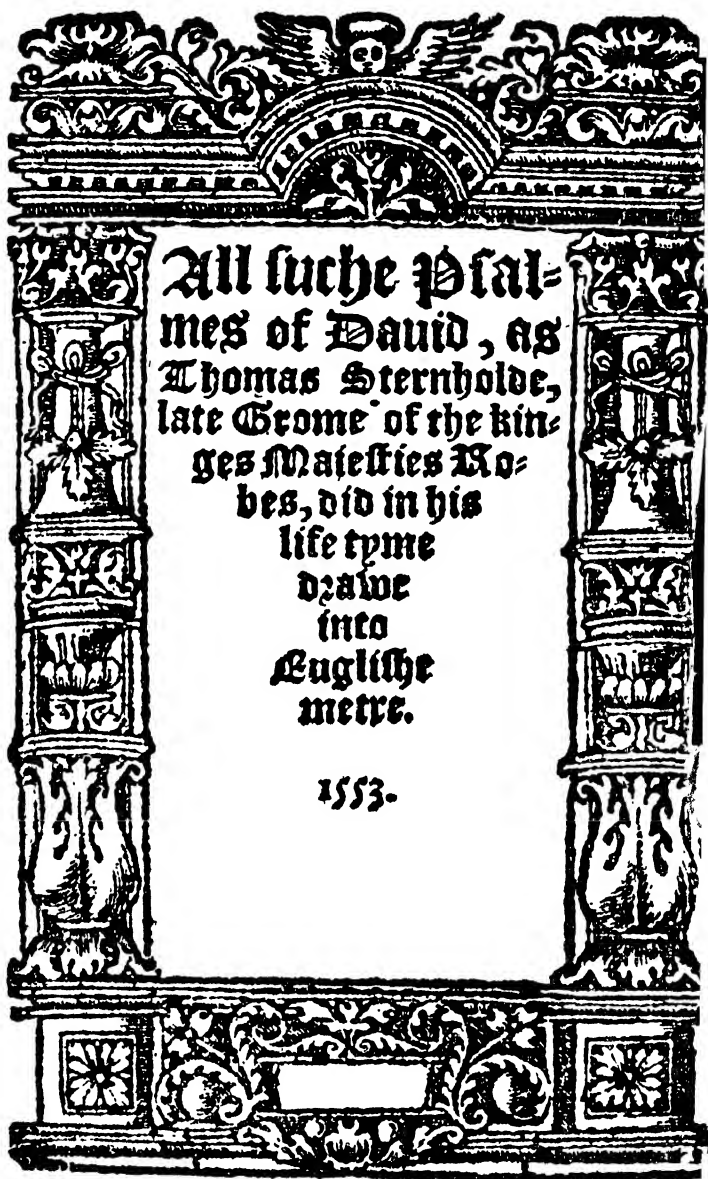


*Bibliographical Series*  
*of Supplements to 'British Book News'*  
*on Writers and Their Work*



I. Title-page of Sternholde's version of the Psalms (1553)

# ENGLISH HYMNS

*by*

ARTHUR POLLARD

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# ENGLISH HYMNS

## I

**H**YMNS form part of the literary consciousness of every Englishman, whatever his creed or sect. Children are taught them and sing them day by day at school, at church, and often at home as well. They are a kind of folk-poetry known by, and appealing to, all classes of the community. Even those who do not subscribe to the beliefs embodied in the hymns readily respond to the phrases, references and echoes from English hymnody which are to be found scattered throughout English literature.

The Christian Church has always sung. St. Paul on the one hand and the younger Pliny on the other speak of the 'psalms and hymns and spiritual songs' by which the church of the first century sought to glorify God. So it has continued through the ages. In England the Reformation gave an impetus to hymn-singing and to hymn-writing. It did this in two main ways—first, by the substitution of English for Latin in the services of the Church, and secondly, by giving the congregation a more prominent part in the act of worship. Between the Reformation and the present day more than 400,000 hymns have been written in the English language. This brief essay sets out to accomplish two tasks, one to show the extent of this hymnody which has permeated so strongly the literary consciousness of the English nation, the other to indicate some of the intrinsic poetic value of the best hymns in the language.

Tennyson has said that 'a good hymn is the most difficult thing in the world to write'. Let us begin therefore by asking what constitutes a good hymn. It is my view that a good hymn can be poetry in its own right. It must, of course, be 'sing-able', since hymns are meant to be sung. Indeed, some

of the best-known hymns owe much of their popularity to the tunes as well as to the words. This requirement means that hymns have to be written in simple measures. Watts even went so far as to write a number of his hymns in three versions, in short (6.6.8.6), long (8.8.8.8) and common (8.6.8.6) measures, so that they might be easily sung by different congregations. In general, the words also and the imagery should be simple. Moreover, the hymn is never a piece of private poetry (that is why Donne's *Hymns* and Tennyson's *Crossing the Bar* with their very strong expression of personal experience cannot really be regarded as hymns proper), nor is its appeal limited to a narrow group. It is directed at a wide audience, differing vastly in background, education and sensibility. Furthermore, this audience must feel that it is able to share in the thoughts and emotions evoked by the hymn. That is one reason why the good hymn can never be a product of narrow sectarianism. The hymn-books of the various English denominations show representatives of the different communions side by side, Anglican and Methodist, Baptist and Congregationalist, even Roman Catholic and Unitarian. Because the good hymn is so wide in its appeal, it can speak also to those who are not Christians, for the scope of the good hymn is broadly human, speaking to those emotions, humilities and aspirations which are found in all men everywhere.

## II

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were the most prolific periods in the history of English hymnody. Of the 1410 authors of original British hymns enumerated in Mr. Sedgwick's catalogue, published in 1863, 1213 are of later date than 1707.<sup>1</sup> Whilst no figures are available, it is

<sup>1</sup> R. Palmer, Earl of Selborne, *Hymns: Their History and Development*, 1892, p. 171, referring to D. Sedgwick's *Comprehensive Index of Names of original Authors of Hymns*, 2nd edition, 1863.



reasonable to assume that in our own less pious century the writing of hymns is a much rarer occupation than at any time in the past three hundred years. Various collections of hymns had been published before 1700. Chief of these was what was to become known as the 'Old Version' of the metrical psalms. It was also referred to as 'Sternhold and Hopkins' after the names of the two chief contributors to the completed collection which first appeared in 1562. Nearly three-quarters of the version is in common metre (8.6.8.6) because it fitted in with well-known tunes, and to this early popularity we may perhaps ascribe the later widespread employment of this measure for hymns. Though none of the hymns in 'Sternhold and Hopkins' is now sung, their edition was never really superseded by the 'New Version' of the metrical psalms by Tate and Brady (1696). Only one hymn associated with Sternhold and Hopkins—and that did not appear in the completed edition—is now used. It is the 'Old Hundredth', 'All people that on earth do dwell', usually attributed to William Kethe (died 1594). Written in long metre (8.8.8.8) it has all those qualities of simplicity and directness referred to above. Its four verses divide neatly into invitation, statement of God's love and care, renewed invitation, repeated statement of God's character. It is predominantly monosyllabic; it is composed almost entirely of simple sentences; and it has but a single image, and that is the familiar one of sheep and the shepherd. Moreover, even this image may have been made more prominent by an early mis-reading:

We are his folck, he doth us fede,  
And for his shepe, he doth us take.

became:

We are His flock, He doth us feed  
And for His sheep He doth us take.

This hymn also has the essential qualities of fervour and spontaneity:

All people that on earth do dwell,  
 Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice;  
 Him serve with fear, His praise forth tell,  
 Come ye before Him, and rejoice.

The universal invitation of the first line and the way in which all leads up to the last word of the last line reveal, with the lilt of the verse, the writer's own joy in praising God.

In recent years the seventeenth century has been more generally recognized for its contribution to English hymnody than it used to be. Herbert, Milton, Bunyan<sup>1</sup> all find a place in *Songs of Praise* and *The English Hymnal*, but the fact remains that not until we reach Thomas Ken (1637-1711) do we find the authentic voice of the great hymn-writer. His Morning, Evening and Midnight hymns were appended to *A Manual of Prayers for the Use of the Scholars of Winchester College* (1695), but this little book first appeared in 1674 and reference is made there to the hymns. 'Awake my soul, and with the sun' and 'Glory to thee, my God, this night' are part of the undying heritage of English hymnody. The original fourteen verses of 'Awake my soul' are reduced in *Hymns Ancient and Modern* to eight, and the hymn is divided into two parts. Much of the hymn is, appropriately for those intended to sing it, didactic:

As all thy Converse be sincere,  
 Thy Conscience as the Noon-day clear;  
 Think how All-seeing God thy ways,  
 And all thy secret Thoughts surveys.

(1695 version)

The first two lines of this verse illustrate the sense of innocence and freshness which suffuses the whole hymn, whilst the last two with their balance and Latinate inclusions ('secret', 'surveys') exemplify the sense of authority and restraint in the work. Two notes intermingle throughout this hymn, those of conduct and worship, epitomized in the words of the first verse, 'Thy daily stage of duty run'

<sup>1</sup> For details of these and other writers referred to throughout this essay, consult the Bibliography.

and 'Pay thy morning sacrifice'. They reach their climax in the last two verses:

Direct, controul, Suggest this day  
All I design, or do, or say,  
That all my Powers, with all their Might,  
In thy sole Glory may Unite.

Praise God from whom all Blessings flow,  
Praise Him all Creatures here below,  
Praise Him above ye Heavenly Host,  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

(1709 version)

Nothing is here discordant or irrelevant. Fervour, simplicity, dignity all combine in this supreme example of the hymnic art. The same qualities, but perhaps not quite the same achievement, are to be found in 'Glory to thee, my God, this night'.

Tate and Brady's collection of metrical psalms, *A New Version of the Psalms of David* (1696), has now almost sunk into the oblivion of its predecessor, 'Sternhold and Hopkins'. 'Through all the changing scenes of life' and 'As pants the hart for cooling streams' alone remain. Elegant Augustan dress is hardly suitable clothing for the often rugged and forceful sentiments of Old Testament religion. The original twenty-two verses of 'Through all the changing scenes of life' are now usually reduced to five. The hymn has all the neatness and grace which we often attribute to eighteenth-century verse. Unfortunately, these qualities are there at the expense of lyric vigour and even directness. The simplicity of:

'O taste, and see, how gracious the Lord is: blessed is the man  
that trusteth in him'.

becomes:

O make but trial of His love,  
Experience will decide  
How bless'd are they, and only they  
Who in His truth confide.

This sort of expression is to be found again in Addison (1672-1719), the representative *par excellence* of early eighteenth-century un'enthusiastic' religion. Of the five hymns which he appended to essays in *The Spectator* it will be sufficient to consider 'When all Thy mercies, O my God'. This hymn considers God's goodness at every stage of man's life and enforces man's duty to praise Him. The first verse is typical of the whole:

When all Thy mercies, O my God,  
My rising soul surveys,  
Transported with the view, I'm lost  
In wonder, love and praise.

The hymn is orderly, dignified, and reverent, but like others of its period it seems lacking in intimacy and immediacy. The nearest Addison ever gets to 'letting himself go' is in the last verse, and even that is cool in comparison with the fervour of, say, Cowper or Newton:

Through all eternity to Thee  
A joyful song I'll raise;  
But oh! eternity's too short  
To utter all Thy praise.

### III

Isaac Watts (1674-1748), was of a very different temper. Writing at the same time as Addison, he came from a very different background. Whereas Addison was born in a clerical household, went to Charterhouse and Oxford and figured prominently in public life, Watts's father was a persecuted Dissenter and he himself was excluded from the universities and spent his life as a Dissenting preacher. With his background and beliefs, religion for Watts was a very intense affair. The Puritan tradition lived on in English Dissent. For Watts it meant the dedication of the whole of his poetic talents to the service of God. It meant this, both

because God, to quote a line from Watts, 'Demands my soul, my life, my all', and also because to use one's talents other than in God's service would be to serve 'the world'. The secular world and its music were regarded by the Dissenters as sinful. This in itself set up a demand for holy song. A further demand arose from the greater freedom of worship possessed by the Dissenters as compared with the Church of England. Whereas even into the nineteenth-century there were bishops, clergy and people to be found opposing the introduction of hymns into the order of Anglican worship, the Dissenters freely accepted this mode of worshipping God. In one yet further way Watts's Dissenting heritage helped him. The sense of being the elect people of God with the accompanying feeling of assurance contributes in some degree to the confidence which is so marked a characteristic of Watts's religious temper.

With Wesley, Watts stands unrivalled among English hymnists. He wrote over 600 hymns, and a good number are still sung. 'When I survey the wondrous Cross', 'There is a land of pure delight', 'Our God, our help in ages past' and 'Jesus shall reign where'er the sun' are more than enough to establish his claim to greatness. Like some of his predecessors, Watts published his own version of *The Psalms of David* (1719), but in his case with an important difference indicated by the following words of the title '*Imitated in the Language of the New Testament*'. In the preface he wrote:

For why should I now address God my Saviour in a song, with *Burnt Sacrifices of Fatlings*, and with the *Incense of Rams*? Why should I pray to be *sprinkled with Hysop*, or recur to the *Blood of Bullocks and Goats*? . . . Where the Psalmist has described Religion by Fear of God, I have joined Faith and love to it.

Watts's rendering is, in consequence, freer and more selective than those of his precursors. He has, in fact, Christianized the Psalms. Though this might not be obvious

in 'Our God, our help in ages past', his noble rendering of Psalm 90, it is quite unmistakable in the missionary fervour of 'Jesus shall reign', his version of part of Psalm 72.

There is something rugged, something of the character of the pioneer, in Watts's Christianity. It is marked by the feeling of danger and adventure, struggle and hardship, and yet confidence in ultimate victory. His awareness of the vast world in which man moves so apparently insignificantly is balanced by his sense of the power of God. In its apprehension of space, time and eternity Watts's vision is panoramic:

His kingdom stretch from shore to shore  
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

This is from 'Jesus shall reign', but it is in 'Our God, our help in ages past' that the essential Watts is found. It is here particularly that he contrasts the power of God and the weakness of man. His God is a majestic Deity, very much the Jehovah-figure of the Old Testament, Creator, Sustainer and Judge of all things, 'The voice that wills the stars along'. There is a primitive quality about the sentiment in such verses as:

Our God, our Help in Ages past,  
Our Hope for years to come,  
Our shelter from the stormy blast,  
And our Eternal Home

. . . .

Before the Hills in order stood,  
And Earth received her Frame,  
From everlasting Thou art God,  
To endless Years the same.

There is no Addisonian, over-civilized, drawing-room piety here. Here is man, naked and helpless, acknowledging his one resource, the matchless strength of his eternal God. There are no refinements or qualifications about Watts's view of man and God. His images and comparisons are nothing if not extreme:

A Thousand Ages in Thy Sight  
 Are like an evening gone;  
 Short as the Watch that ends the Night  
 Before the rising sun

. . . .

Time like an ever-rolling Stream  
 Bears all its Sons away;  
 They fly forgotten as a Dream  
 Dies at the opening Day.

Like flow'ry Fields the Nations stand  
 Pleased with the Morning Light;  
 The Flowers beneath the Mower's Hand  
 Lie withering e'er 'tis Night.

Then follows the triumphant assertion and prayer of the last verse, repeating almost completely the words with which 'Our God, our help' begins.

'Jesus shall reign', as these first three words show, possesses the same Wattsean confidence as 'Our God, our help', but it is cast generally in a serener, gentler mood. The Dissenter, like his Puritan forbears, saw this life as a time of conflict, of persecutions without and stern moral compulsions within. From this he looked forward to the Kingdom, either as in this hymn that Kingdom which will 'stretch from shore to shore' on this earth:

People and realms of every tongue  
 Dwell on His love with sweetest song;  
 And infant voices shall proclaim  
 Their early blessings on His name.

Blessings abound where'er He reigns,  
 The prisoner leaps to lose his chains;  
 The weary find eternal rest,  
 And all the sons of want are blessed

or else, as in another hymn, to that kingdom beyond death:

There is a land of pure delight  
 Where saints immortal reign,  
 Infinite day excludes the night,  
 And pleasures banish pain.

The simple, direct opposition of the last line, an opposition marked by the force of the verb 'banish' is evidence of the sharp distinctions of Dissenting experience. Two images dominate the rest of this hymn. They are employed in the second verse:

There everlasting spring abides,  
And never withering flowers:  
Death, like a narrow sea, divides  
This heavenly land from ours.

Both are then set in the experience of the Israelites crossing over Jordan to the promised land. In this choice of reference Watts is employing a time-honoured mode of interpreting Old Testament history. There are two things here to note. First there is his fondness for the Old Testament; he found the experiences it recorded spiritually congenial. Secondly, we see again stark opposition, the rigours and fears of the present set against the joys beyond:

Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood  
Stand dressed in living green:  
So to the Jews old Canaan stood,  
While Jordan rolled between.

But timorous mortals start and shrink  
To cross this narrow sea,  
And linger shivering on the brink,  
And fear to launch away.

O! could we make our doubts remove,  
Those gloomy doubts that rise,  
And see the Canaan that we love  
With unclouded eyes!

Could we but climb where Moses stood,  
And view the landscape o'er,  
Not Jordan's stream, nor death's cold flood  
Should fright us from the shore.

I have quoted this hymn in its entirety for two reasons, first to illustrate Watts's use of imagery and secondly to



Nor dares a Wave of Trouble roll  
Across my peaceful Breast.

**LXVI.** *A Prospect of Heaven makes  
Death easy.*

- 1 **T**Here is a Land of pure Delight  
Where Saints Immortal reign,  
Infinite Day excludes the Night,  
And Pleasures banish Pain.
- 2 There everlasting Spring abides,  
And never-withering Flowers :  
Death like a narrow Sea divides  
This Heav'nly Land from ours.
- 3 Sweet Fields beyond the swelling Flood  
Stand drest in living Green :  
So to the *Jews* Old *Canaan* stood,  
While *Jordan* roll'd between.
- 4 But timorous Mortals start and shrink  
To cross this narrow Sea,  
And linger shivering on the Brink,  
And fear to lanch away.
- 5 O could we make our Doubts remove,  
These gloomy Doubts that rise,  
And see the *Canaan* that we love,  
With unclouded Eyes.
- 6 Could we but climb where *Moses* stood,  
And view the Landskip o're, (Flood  
Not *Jordan's* Stream, nor Death's cold  
Should fright us from the Shore.

LXVII. *God's*

notice the structure of the work. In choosing 'the land of pure delight' and the sea of death, Watts takes two familiar images. To be successful, the hymn-writer's images must be familiar; novelty is here a distraction. Nevertheless, as Watts shows, the familiar image can be employed and developed with freshness and power. There is nothing banal about his use of these figures. If the reader will look back at the verses quoted from 'Our God, our help' he will find that the same is true there. 'Time like an ever-rolling stream' and 'A Thousand Ages . . . like an evening gone' are quite simple, but extremely vivid. In 'There is a land' the structure of the hymn is erected around those central images, but Watts is not tempted to overwork these images with elaborate variation. He is as economical in this respect as in others. There is nothing tautologous. In the last two verses with their invocation there is some parallelism and near-repetition, but all is necessary for the emphasis which he requires.

There is something of the epic quality in Watts's religious vision. Time sweeps on, God's Kingdom stretches from shore to shore, heaven is the vast landscape seen as Moses saw it, from the top of the mountain. It is not surprising therefore that the Cross was where the Prince of glory died. Notice Watts's fondness for the imagery of power and rule—'Jesus shall reign', the land 'Where saints immortal reign', and here not Jesus, nor Christ, nor even Lord, but, to use Watts's original phrase, 'the young Prince of glory'. It has been aptly remarked that not since the Old English *Dream of the Rood* had anyone envisaged the Crucifixion like this. This is the heroic view. The Cross is not just seen, beheld, or looked upon; it is 'surveyed':

When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of Glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

The unjustly omitted fourth verse of this hymn is almost frighteningly vivid, but the picture shows the blood-soaked

figure not as sordid, not as a victim, but as majestic, as a King:

His dying crimson, like a robe,  
Spreads o'er His body on the tree.

Similarly, in the previous verse, exemplifying the richly meaningful significance of the saving blood of Christ to those who believed as Watts did, he daringly bids us look not on a pathetic bleeding sufferer, but to:

See from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Watts convinces us that this is 'Love so amazing, so divine'. The drama is being enacted before our eyes, and in the presence of a deed like this, each of us is forced to acknowledge that:

My richest gain I count but loss  
And pour contempt on all my pride.  
  
Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ my God!  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood.

In considering Watts one thinks of strength, power, firmness, both in thought and expression. Strong simple statement, clear images, definite rhythms—these are the means he employed to convey his sense of the power and love of God on the one hand and the creaturehood of man on the other.

Like Watts, Toplady (1740–1778) in his one memorable hymn 'Rock of Ages' dealt with the elemental relationship of man and God. In company with all the leaders of the eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival, he insisted that each one of us is a sinner condemned to spiritual death and that only the blood of Christ, shed on the Cross, can save us.

Man is helpless. This theme occupies Toplady in the third verse of 'Rock of Ages':

Nothing in my hand I bring;  
Simply to Thy Cross I cling  
Naked, come to Thee for dress;  
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the Fountain fly;  
Wash me, Saviour, or I die!

Line after line emphasizes not just man's, but Toplady's own particular helplessness, until the verse reaches its last line of desperate plea and dire alternative. And what could be more emphatically personal in its reference than the first line 'Rock of Ages, cleft for me'? Again characteristically Evangelical, Toplady sought to be strictly Scriptural. He wrote: 'That the Dignity of Truths might be impair'd as little as possible by the manner of expressing them, they are often introduced in the *very Words* of the inspir'd writers'. He quotes the Bible, but he also quite daringly mingles his references. God is first the 'Rock of Ages', the eternal, immovable, unchangeable protector: but then the Rock is 'cleft' and Toplady thinks of the Saviour with His 'riven side':

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee!  
Let the water and the blood,  
From Thy riven side which flowed,  
Be of sin the double cure,  
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.

That 'cleft' Rock and 'riven side' show us Toplady's vision of the Cross not as a demonstration of sorrow and love, but of terrifying suffering. There is a lot of fear in Toplady. It is:

Wash me, Saviour, or I die!

and the last verse dwells on physical frailty, the suffering of death, the unknown hereafter and then, not 'a land of pure

P S A L M S  
 A N D  
 H Y M N S  
 F O R  
 PUBLIC AND PRIVATE  
 W O R S H I P.

---

Collected (for the most part), and Published,  
 By AUGUSTUS TOPLADY, A. B.  
 Vicar of BROAD HEMBURY.

---

*En, sanctos manibus puris ut sumeret ignes,  
 Vestalem se Musa facit.* COULEI DAVIDEID.

*Quis neget, in harum meditationum praxi, nucleum pietatis, sanctitatisque, situm esse?*

WITSIUS, de Œc. l. iii. c. 4.

*Quam decorum est animæ justificatæ, et in amoris hujus sensu liquecenti; pleno jubilo, canticum novum, canticum redamationis mutux, justificanti Deo occinere!*

Ibid. c. 8.

---

L O N D O N :

Printed for E. and C. DILLY. 1776.

III. Title-page of the first edition of *Psalms and Hymns for Public and Private Worship* by Augustus Toplady (1776)

delight', but God on His judgement-throne. Little wonder that he wants to hide himself in God:

While I draw this fleeting breath,  
When my eyestrings break in death,  
When I soar through tracts unknown,  
See Thee on Thy judgement-throne;  
Rock of ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee!

#### IV

In Charles Wesley (1707-1788), this fear of deserved and impending wrath is replaced by amazement at the love and mercy of God. Exclamation and rhetorical question express this wonder:

Depth of mercy! can there be  
Mercy still reserved for me?

or:

And can it be that I should gain  
An interest in the Saviour's blood?  
Died He for me, who caused His pain?  
For me, who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! how can it be  
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

. . . .

He left His Father's throne above,  
(So free, so infinite his grace!)  
Emptied Himself of all but love,  
And bled for Adam's helpless race:  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,  
For, O my God, it found out me!

Charles Wesley, the most prolific of writers, is said to have written over 6,500 hymns. The best of these, together with some from other writers, were published in 1780 in *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists*.

John Wesley, brother of Charles, who with his assistants had preached all over England from 1738, was the leader of the Methodists. Thousands had been converted by this ministry, and groups of believers met together in towns and villages in classes, the organization of which led to their being known as Methodists. They did not in John Wesley's own lifetime separate from the Church of England, but these classes, free from the set order of the Church, allowed the Methodists, like the Dissenters, to introduce hymns in their worship. The Methodists became, and still are, a people singing to God.

Hence the pervasive note of praise in Charles Wesley's work. His hymn 'O for a thousand tongues to sing' stands at the head of all Methodist collections:

O for a thousand tongues to sing  
My great Redeemer's praise,  
The glories of my God and King,  
The triumphs of His grace!

My gracious Master and my God,  
Assist me to proclaim,  
To spread through all the earth abroad  
The honours of Thy name.

Jesus! the name that charms our fears  
That bids our sorrows cease;  
'Tis music in the sinner's ears,  
'Tis life and health and peace.

The rhythm, the arrangement of sentences (notice the parallelisms in the last two lines of the first and third verses), the restriction of each verse to a single clearly stated but not over-elaborated idea all go to produce the effect of freedom and spontaneity.

Wesley praises God because he knows the love of God. That is evident in both the third verse above and in 'And can it be . . .' His God is a 'gracious Master'. Much of the warmth and intimacy of Wesley derives from his delighted insistence

---

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A  
C O L L E C T I O N  
O F  
H Y M N S, &c.

---

P A R T I.

Containing Introductory Hymns.

S E C T I O N I.

*Exhorting, and beseeching to return to God.*

H Y M N I.

- 1 **O** For a thousand tongues to sing  
My dear Redeemer's praise!  
The glories of my God and King,  
The triumphs of his grace!
- 2 My gracious Master and my God,  
Assist me to proclaim;  
To spread through all the earth abroad  
The honours of thy name.
- 3 Jesus, the name that charms our fears,  
That bids our sorrows cease:  
'Tis music in the sinner's ears;  
'Tis life, and health, and peace.

4 Hc

IV. From *A Collection of Hymns* by John Wesley (1780)



upon the love of God. For Watts God is 'a shelter in the stormy blast', but in like circumstances Wesley prays:

Jesu, Lover of my soul,  
Let me to Thy bosom fly,  
While the nearer waters roll,  
While the tempest still is high.

The dominant note of the hymn is of Christ's goodness rather than the storm's terror:

Thou, O Christ, art all I want,  
More than all in Thee I find!  
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint,  
Heal the sick, and lead the blind:  
Just and holy is Thy name,  
I am all unrighteousness;  
False and full of sin I am,  
Thou art full of truth and grace.

The first part of the verse shows the all-sufficiency of Christ, first by assertion and then by examples. Then in the second half by a fine use of chiasmus, he balances Christ's perfection in the fifth and eighth lines and contrasts it with his own sin in the sixth and seventh.<sup>1</sup> It is typical of Wesley that, though he begins with a reference to God as 'just and holy', he ends by describing Him as 'full of truth and grace'. That grace is the subject of the last verse:

Plenteous grace with Thee is found,  
Grace to cover all my sin,  
Let the healing streams abound;  
Make and keep me pure within:  
Thou of life the fountain art,  
Freely let me take of Thee,  
Spring Thou up within my heart,  
Rise to all eternity.

Again one notices the freshness of this verse. With this is to be connected that strenuous search for purity, Christian

<sup>1</sup> See the detailed examination of these lines in B. L. Manning's *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts* (1942).

perfection, among the Methodists. Compare with the desire of the verse above the last of 'Love Divine, all loves excelling':

Finish then Thy new creation,  
Pure and spotless let us be;  
Let us see Thy great salvation,  
Perfectly restored in Thee;

Changed from glory into glory,  
Till in heav'n we take our place,  
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,  
Lost in wonder, love and praise!

Wesley knows just how quickly he may move. Without being repetitive, he impresses one idea or image firmly upon the reader's mind before moving on to the next. Each of the lines in this verse expresses its own idea, each advances a little on that of its predecessor, until the whole verse finds its climax in the final line.

Wesley wrote hymns for all the major festivals of the Christian year, and, as we would expect, joy and praise is everywhere the keynote. 'Christ, the Lord, is risen to-day', 'Hail the day that sees him rise', 'Hark! the herald-angels sing', even 'Lo! He comes with clouds descending' are hymns of praise. In the last, an Advent hymn, 'Describing Judgement' as the Methodist Hymn-Book tells us, he first envisages the coming of God accompanied by the praise of His saints:

Thousand thousand saints attending  
Swell the triumph of His train:  
Hallelujah!

and though he must concede:

Every eye shall now behold Him  
Robed in dreadful majesty;  
Those who set at nought and sold Him,  
Deeply wailing,  
Shall the true Messiah see,

he prefers to concentrate upon:

The dear tokens of His passion  
 Still His dazzling body bears;  
 Cause of endless exultation  
 To His ransomed worshippers;  
 With what rapture  
 Gaze we on those glorious scars!

Yea, Amen! let all adore Thee. . . .

These verses show us also the fluency of Wesley's muse. His range of metres is much wider than that of Watts and he was much more willing to use lines with odd numbers of syllables, 7's and 5's, than was Watts. In general this lightened and speeded up his verse. Again, his vocabulary is wider than that of Watts, and he uses polysyllabic words with consummate and inimitable confidence. Where is there anything to compare with:

Our God contracted to a span  
 Incomprehensibly made man.

Yet this is no mere verbal ingenuity. Wesley had too high a regard for language for that. His brother in the Preface claimed not unjustly that: '1. In these hymns there is no doggerel; no botches; nothing put in to patch up the rhyme; no feeble expletives. 2. Here is nothing turgid or bombast on the one hand, or low and creeping, on the other. 3. Here are no *cant* expressions; no words without meaning . . . 4. Here are, allow me to say, both the purity, the strength and the elegance of the English language.'

'Hark! the herald-angels sing' is Wesley's Christmas hymn. Whereas Nahum Tate's (1652-1715) 'While shepherds watched their flocks by night' is wholly, and John Byrom's 'Christians, awake, salute the happy morn' largely, versified narrative, Wesley's hymn is not. It is a call to praise, a statement of Christ's purpose in the Incarnation, and a prayer that He will fashion man in His own image:

Hark! the herald-angels sing  
 'Glory to the new-born King,  
 Peace on earth, and mercy mild;  
 God and sinners reconciled.' . . .

Hail the heaven-born Prince of peace!  
 Hail the Sun of righteousness!  
 Light and life to all He brings,  
 Risen with healing in His wings. . . .

Adam's likeness, Lord, efface;  
 Stamp Thy image in its place;  
 Second Adam from above,  
 Reinstall us in Thy love!  
 Let us Thee, though lost, regain,  
 Thee, the Life, the Heavenly Man:  
 O! to all Thyself impart  
 Formed in each believing heart!

By contrast, here are two verses from Byrom's hymn:

Christians, awake, salute the happy morn,  
 Whereon the Saviour of mankind was born;  
 Rise to adore the mystery of love,  
 Which hosts of angels chanted from above;  
 With them the joyful tidings first began  
 Of God incarnate and the Virgin's Son.

. . . .

To Bethlehem straight the enlightened shepherds ran,  
 To see the wonders God had wrought for man:  
 Then to their flocks, still praising God, return,  
 And their glad hearts with holy rapture burn;  
 Amazed, the wondrous tidings they proclaim,  
 The first apostles of His infant fame.

Byrom (1692-1763), is less exuberant than Wesley. Wesley shouts his praise; his words are 'Hark!' and 'Hail!'. Byrom more quietly adores the 'mystery of love'. The very form of the verse (10's) makes the pace slacker, the mood more contemplative, than in Wesley. Such a form is, moreover, unusual in the eighteenth century; it belongs rather to the nineteenth.

But before we move to that century we must consider two writers, of vastly differing temperaments, who collaborated in the *Olney Hymns*. They are John Newton (1725-1807) and William Cowper (1731-1800). The one was a fiery, converted slave-trader, the other a gentle, retiring poet, subject to fits of melancholy and insanity. That masculine confidence which we associate with Watts is found again in Newton:

Glorious things of Thee are spoken,  
 Zion, city of our God!  
 He, whose word cannot be broken,  
 Form'd Thee for His own abode:  
 On the rock of ages founded,  
 What can shake Thy sure repose?  
 With salvation's walls surrounded,  
 Thou may'st smile at all Thy foes.

. . . .

Saviour, if of Zion's city  
 I through grace a member am;  
 Let the world deride or pity,  
 I will glory in Thy name:  
 Fading is the worldling's pleasure,  
 All his boasted pomp and show;  
 Solid joys and lasting treasure,  
 None but Zion's children know.

The assurance behind his assertions, his contempt of the world and its ways ('Let the world deride . . . All his boasted pomp'), the strong conclusion, the emphatic movement of the lines all combine to produce the note of confidence. Newton's other well-known hymn is a mellower production:

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds  
 In a believer's ear!  
 It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds  
 And drives away his fear.

but it rises at the end into a fervent crescendo of praise:

Weak is the effort of my heart,  
And cold my warmest thought;  
But when I see Thee as Thou art,  
I'll praise Thee as I ought.

Till then I would Thy love proclaim  
With ev'ry fleeting breath;  
And may the music of Thy name  
Refresh my soul in death.

Cowper, rare amongst hymn-writers, is very introspective. Not for him robust assurance; more often it is inadequacy and a sense of deprivation. A typical hymn is:

Oh! for a closer walk with God,  
A calm and heavn'ly frame;  
A light to shine upon the road  
That leads me to the Lamb!

Where is the blessedness I knew,  
When first I saw the Lord?  
Where is the soul-refreshing view  
Of Jesus and His word?

. . . .

Return, O holy Dove, return,  
Sweet messenger of rest;  
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn,  
And drove Thee from my breast.

Even as he contemplates the love of God in 'Hark, my soul! it is the Lord':

Mine is an unchanging love,  
Higher than the heights above;  
Deeper than the depths beneath,  
Free and faithful, strong as death

he must at the end confess his weakness and rather pathetically seek God's help:

Lord, it is my chief complaint  
 That my love is weak and faint;  
 Yet I love Thee and adore,  
 O for grace to love Thee more!

Likewise in his hymn of assurance, 'God moves in a mysterious way' he dwells not so much on the power and wisdom of God as upon the comfort this must bring to His servants.

God moves in a mysterious way  
 His wonders to perform:  
 He plants His footsteps in the sea  
 And rides upon the storm

which soon gives way to:

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take  
 The clouds ye so much dread  
 Are big with mercy and shall break  
 In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
 But trust Him for His grace:  
 Behind a frowning providence  
 He hides a smiling face.

. . . .

Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
 And scan His work in vain;  
 God is His own interpreter  
 And He will make it plain.

Cowper's statements and measures are simple, but he does derive a certain richness and depth from his imagery, as the verses quoted from 'God moves . . .' above will show.

## V

With Cowper we come to the last of the major hymnists produced by the Evangelical Revival. We must move now to a group of early nineteenth-century writers—Heber,

Montgomery and Lyte. Reginald Heber (1783-1826) tried to get a hymn-book authorized for use in the Church of England, but both the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London repulsed his approaches. His own hymns were published posthumously in 1827. The finest of them is 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty'. It breathes awe and adoration:

Holy, holy, holy, though the darkness hide Thee,  
 Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see,  
 Only Thou art holy, there is none beside Thee,  
 Perfect in power, in love, and purity.

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!  
 All Thy works shall praise Thy name in earth, and sky, and sea.  
 Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!  
 God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Elsewhere he is often too content with the sensuous effects which he knew so well how to create. One after another they flash upon us:

From Greenland's icy mountains,  
 From India's coral strand,  
 Where Afric's sunny fountains  
 Roll down their golden strand. . . .

What though the spicy breezes  
 Blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle; . . .

. . . . Can we to men benighted  
 The lamp of life deny? . . .

Waft, waft, ye winds, His story  
 And you, ye waters, roll,  
 Till like a sea of glory  
 It spreads from pole to pole. . . .

Mingled with them is Heber's missionary fervour, less strenuous perhaps than in Watts's 'Jesus shall reign', but full of sunny joy:



Salvation! O salvation!  
 The joyful sound proclaim,  
 Till each remotest nation  
 Has learnt Messiah's Name

and then on to the last verse:

Waft, waft, ye winds, His story, . . .  
 Till o'er our ransomed nature  
 The Lamb for sinners slain,  
 Redeemer, King, Creator,  
 In bliss returns to reign.

This hymn, with a number of Montgomery's such as 'Lift up your heads, ye gates of brass' and 'Hail to the Lord's Anointed', reflects the resurgence of interest in missionary work during the early nineteenth century.

Heber's pictorial effects cover a wonderful range. At one time it is the quiet scene:

By cool Siloam's shady rill  
 How sweet the lily grows!  
 How sweet the breath beneath the hill  
 Of Sharon's dewy rose!

At another it is the startling vividness of the martyr hymn:

The Son of God goes forth to war,  
 A kingly crown to gain:  
 His blood-red banner streams afar;  
 Who follows in His train?  
  
 They met the tyrant's brandished steel,  
 The lion's gory mane;  
 They bowed their necks the death to feel;  
 Who follows in their train?

Perhaps at times these effects are too florid, but at his best, as in his Epiphany Hymn, he is able to evoke a complex response. In:

Brightest and best of the sons of the morning!  
 Dawn on our darkness and lend us Thine aid!  
 Star of the East, the horizon adorning,  
 Guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.

Cold on His cradle the dew-drops are shining,  
 Low lies His head with the beasts of the stall;  
 Angels adore Him in slumber reclining,  
 Maker and Monarch and Saviour of all!

Say, shall we yield Him, in costly devotion,  
 Odours of Edom and off'rings divine?  
 Gems of the mountain and pearls of the ocean,  
 Myrrh from the forest or gold from the mine?

Vainly we offer each ample oblation;  
 Vainly with gold would His favour secure:  
 Richer by far is the heart's adoration;  
 Dearer to God are the prayers of the poor.

Heber suggests very strikingly the picture of the lowly yet mighty Christ and the Magi offering their gifts before Him. He combines reverence and mystery with warm devotion and worship.

Heber's contemporary, James Montgomery (1771-1854), Radical journalist and minor poet, is not sufficiently esteemed as a hymn-writer. Julian (*Dictionary of Hymnology*, p. 765) has written of him: 'Richly poetic without exuberance, dogmatic without uncharitableness, tender without sentimentality, elaborate without diffusiveness, richly musical without apparent effort, he has bequeathed to the Church of Christ wealth which could only have come from a true genius and a sanctified heart.' Sometimes Montgomery can speak quietly—but with profound understanding—as in 'Prayer is the soul's sincere desire':

Prayer is the simplest form of speech  
 That infant lips can try,  
 Prayer the sublimest strains that reach  
 The Majesty on high.

More often, however, the tone is more in keeping with that of the one-time Radical journalist. His apocalyptic hymn reads like a confident manifesto. He looks for victory over the social evils of earth:

Hail to the Lord's Anointed,  
Great David's greater Son!  
Hail, in the time appointed,  
His reign on earth begun!  
He comes to break oppression,  
To set the prisoner free,  
To take away transgression,  
And rule in equity.

He comes with succour speedy,  
To those who suffer wrong;  
To help the poor and needy,  
And bid the weak be strong:  
To give them songs for singing,  
Their darkness turn to light,  
Whose souls, condemn'd and dying,  
Were precious in His sight.

The whole hymn rings with confident shall's. The struggle and aspiration to that victory is vividly illustrated in his account of the spiritual battle:

Lift up your heads, ye gates of brass;  
Ye bars of iron, yield;  
And let the King of Glory pass:  
The Cross is in the field.

That banner, brighter than the star  
That leads the train of night,  
Shines on the march, and guides from far  
His servants to the fight.

. . . .

Then fear not, faint not, halt not now;  
In Jesus' Name be strong!  
To Him shall all the nations bow,  
And sing the triumph song.

Uplifted are the gates of brass,  
The bars of iron yield;  
Behold the King of Glory pass;  
The Cross hath won the field.

Montgomery, unlike Heber with his elaborate rhythmical schemes, is content with simple metres, firmly stressed. He resembles Heber, however, in his recourse to visual effects. But, as we would expect, Montgomery's pictures are always pictures of action. We see this again in 'For ever with the Lord', where the Radical seeking political Utopia has become the Christian yearning for heaven:

For ever with the Lord:  
 Amen, so let it be.  
 Life from the dead is in that word,  
 'Tis immortality.  
 Here in the body pent,  
 Absent from Him I roam,  
 Yet nightly pitch my moving tent  
 A day's march nearer home.  
 . . . .  
 I hear at morn and even,  
 At noon and midnight hour  
 The choral harmonies of heaven  
 Earth's babel-tongues o'erpower.  
 That resurrection-word,  
 That shout of victory,  
 Once more, For ever with the Lord;  
 Amen, so let it be.

With the last two hymns I have quoted the first and last verses, because they illustrate also another characteristic of Montgomery's, his habit of beginning and ending a hymn on the same idea. He keeps the idea in mind throughout the hymn and thereby strengthens his hold upon order and relevance.

H. F. Lyte (1793-1847) wrote many hymns, amongst them 'Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven' (a hymn truly spontaneous in its praise) and 'Pleasant are thy courts above'. The hymn, however, by which he is best remembered is 'Abide with me'. It treats tenderly of man in the weakness of his final extremity, resting quietly amid all ills upon

God's power. The contrast of weakness and power comes out clearly in the opening lines:

Abide with me! fast falls the eventide;  
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide!  
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,  
Help of the helpless, O abide with me!

First darkness; then change and the ebbing of life, its 'little day'; and contrasted with these the unchanging character of God:

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;  
Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away;  
Change and decay in all around I see;  
O Thou, who changest not, abide with me!

The last two verses, describing the triumph beyond the darkness of death, bring the sustained contrast to a climax, and the hymn is rounded off with a return to the light/darkness opposition. Now, however, 'The darkness deepens' has given way to 'Heaven's morning breaks':

I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless:  
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness:  
Where is death's sting? where, Grave, thy victory?  
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me!

Hold then Thy Cross before my closing eyes!  
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies!  
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;  
In life and death, O Lord, abide with me!

Lyte's career as a hymnist was contemporaneous with the Oxford (or Tractarian) Movement. Beginning in 1833, this movement under Newman, Keble and Pusey, sought a return to Catholic doctrines and practices within the Church of England. It also gave a new stress to personal devotion. Sometimes indeed this devotion lapsed into sentimentalism, especially in the work of F. W. Faber (1814-1863) and some of the women hymnists. In one of his best hymns—

'O come and mourn with me awhile', Faber prevents tenderness from falling into sentimentalism only by the most delicate balance. Even here, however, Faber's word 'Love' is now usually omitted in favour of 'Lord' in the refrain. It is useful to compare this hymn's view of the dying Christ with the sturdy consideration of Watts in 'When I survey'. Its first three verses read:

O come and mourn with me awhile;  
O come ye to the Saviour's side;  
O come, together let us mourn;  
Jesus, our Love, is crucified.

Have we no tears to shed for Him,  
While soldiers scoff and Jews deride?  
Ah! look how patiently He hangs:  
Jesus, our Love, is crucified.

How fast His Hands and Feet are nail'd;  
His throat with parching thirst is dried,  
His failing Eyes are dimm'd with Blood;  
Jesus, our Love, is crucified.

The emphasis on physical suffering seeks to evoke our pity.

Neither Keble nor Newman is as emotional as this. Keble (1792-1866) reminds us of Ken. His morning and evening hymns, 'New every morning is the love' and 'Sun of my soul, Thou Saviour dear', like Ken's, dwell on the hallowing of all our time to God. In the morning he sings:

The trivial round, the common task,  
Will furnish all we ought to ask;  
Room to deny ourselves; a road  
To bring us daily nearer God.

. . . .

Only, O Lord, in Thy dear love  
Fit us for perfect rest above;  
And help us, this and every day,  
To live more nearly as we pray.

and in the evening:

Watch by the sick, enrich the poor  
With blessings from Thy boundless store!  
Be every mourner's sleep to-night  
Like infant's slumber, pure and light!

Come near and bless us when we wake,  
Ere through the world our way we take  
Till, in the ocean of Thy love,  
We lose ourselves in Heaven above!

These lines do not possess quite the same strength and chastity as those of Ken. Lines such as 'Like infant's slumber, pure and light' and references to losing oneself in the ocean of God's love show Keble's affinity with Faber rather than with Ken.

Best known of all the Tractarians was J. H. (later Cardinal) Newman (1801-1890), and his best known hymn is 'Lead, kindly Light'. Like 'Abide with me' it depends much upon the contrast of light and darkness, and again like that hymn its mood is one of calm reliance upon God despite all difficulties. In the second verse Newman thinks more of the past:

I loved the garish day, and spite of fears,  
Pride ruled my will: Remember not past years!

than does Lyte (at any rate in the version of 'Abide with me' now generally sung). The imagery of Newman's pilgrimage through darkness into light is particularly vivid:

So long Thy Power has blest me, sure it still  
Will lead me on  
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till  
The night is gone,  
And with the morn those angels faces smile  
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile!

These images indeed are perhaps too striking. Their very originality is disturbing. The metre (10.4s), moreover, is

unusual, and the rhyme, especially in the first and third lines gives a greater stress than the words themselves really deserve. His other well-known hymn, 'Praise to the Holiest in the height', taken from his *Dream of Gerontius*, is a much better piece of craftsmanship. The first verse consists of a double chiasmus, which gives a good balance:

Praise to the Holiest in the height,  
And in the depth be praise:  
In all His words most wonderful,  
Most sure in all His ways.

The second verse considers the 'loving wisdom' and the third the 'wisest love' of God. In addition, these two verses contrast the first and second Adam of St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Thence on to Newman's view of the Cross, a predominantly didactic one:

Oh generous love! that He, who smote  
In Man for man the foe,  
The double agony in Man  
For man should undergo;

And in the garden secretly,  
And on the cross on high,  
Should teach His brethren, and inspire  
To suffer and to die.

and to the last verse, repeating the first, not now as assertion, but as proven reason why God should be praised.

But the most notable contribution of the Tractarian Movement to English hymnody was not its original compositions, but its translations. Its appeal to primitive and medieval Christianity brought into new prominence the Greek and Latin hymnists. Neale (1818-1866), and in lesser degree Caswall (1814-1878) and Chandler (1806-1876), were prominent in the work of translation. The most famous of all the translations is Neale's extract from Bernard of Cluny's *De Contemptu Mundi* and especially that part we know as 'Jerusalem the Golden'. Bernard's



poem is a mordant and bitter satire upon the decline of the monastic ideal, an unlikely source for hymns. From it, however, there comes the unalloyed jubilation of Neale's vision of the 'sweet and blessed country, The home of God's elect'. He visualizes an almost blinding 'radiancy of glory':

They stand, those halls of Zion,  
All jubilant with song,  
And bright with many an angel,  
And all the martyr throng;  
The Prince is ever in them,  
The daylight is serene;  
The pastures of the blessed  
Are decked with glorious sheen.

## VI

The nineteenth century was an era prolific in hymns. In the Church of England alone 220 hymn-books appeared between 1800 and 1880. Indeed, the one most generally used among Anglicans to-day, *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, appeared in 1861 as an attempt to bring at least a semblance of order into the prevailing chaos. It had a remarkable success. One consequence of the spate of publications was the appearance of numerous authors, many of whom are now forgotten, together with their hymns, and some of whom are remembered only for a single piece. There is no one in the nineteenth century of the stature of Watts or Wesley. It is with some of those who have left but a few or even only a single hymn of note with whom we must now be concerned.

Two other facts about the nineteenth century must be noted; first, the number of women who wrote hymns, and secondly, the increasing attention given to hymns for children. In the previous century Watts had written his *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* (1715), but his very



success seems to have discouraged imitators. It is to one of the women-writers, Mrs. Cecil Frances Alexander (1823–1895), that we must go to find some of the best-known children's hymns, such as 'All things bright and beautiful', 'There is a green hill' and 'Once in royal David's city'. Easy rhythm, simple vocabulary and vivid images, tender sentiments, plain teaching, all combine to ensure the success of these hymns. The Christmas hymn exemplifies these qualities:

Once in royal David's city  
    Stood a lowly cattle shed,  
Where a mother laid her Baby  
    In a manger for His bed:  
Mary was that mother mild,  
Jesus Christ her little Child.

He came down to earth from heaven  
    Who is God and Lord of all,  
And His shelter was a stable,  
    And His cradle was a stall:  
With the poor and mean and lowly,  
Lived on earth our Saviour holy.

And through all His wondrous childhood  
    He would honour and obey,  
Love, and watch the lowly mother  
    In whose gentle arms He lay:  
Christian children all must be  
Mild, obedient, good as He. . . .

'There is a green hill' first provides an image of Calvary:

There is a green hill far away,  
    Without a city wall,  
Where the dear Lord was crucified  
    Who died to save us all.

next it suggests the extent of Christ's suffering, and then it applies the lesson of this in a simple but comprehensive statement of Christian doctrine:

He died that we might be forgiven,  
 He died to make us good,  
 That we might go at last to heaven,  
 Saved by His precious blood.

. . . .

Oh, dearly, dearly has He loved,  
 And we must love Him too,  
 And trust in His redeeming blood,  
 And try His works to do.

It was a woman also who wrote one of the most popular hymns in the English language, Charlotte Elliott's (1789–1871) 'Just as I am'. In this hymn the statement of human helplessness and sin, which the author never allows to fall into self-pity nor falsifies by exaggeration, is balanced by a counter-statement on the inviting love of God. The opening words repeated in each verse and the refrain do much to hold the hymn together. The metre is (8.8.8.6) and, as well as the repetition, the shorter line of the refrain helps to provide emphasis:

Just as I am—without one plea,  
 But that Thy blood was shed for me,  
 And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee—  
 O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;  
 Sight, riches, healing of the mind,  
 Yea, all I need, in Thee to find—  
 O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am—Thou wilt receive,  
 Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve,  
 Because Thy promise I believe—  
 O Lamb of God, I come.

Sarah Flower Adams's (1805–1848) hymn 'Nearer, my God, to Thee' is another interesting example of metrical virtuosity. It uses very short lines (6.4.6.4.6.6.4). The theme of the hymn is built around Jacob's dream at Bethel:

Nearer, my God, to Thee,  
Nearer to Thee!  
E'en though it be a cross  
That raiseth me:  
Still all my song would be,  
Nearer, my God, to Thee—  
Nearer to Thee!

Though like the wanderer,  
The sun gone down,  
Darkness be over me,  
My rest a stone:  
Yet in my dreams I'd be,  
Nearer, my God, to Thee—  
Nearer to Thee.

Women were also found among the translators, and one of them, Jane Campbell (1817–1878), contributed from the German a hymn to meet part of a new demand, that for hymns suitable for harvest festivals. The introduction of these festivals about 1840 is often attributed to the High Churchman, Archdeacon Denison of Taunton in Somerset. As a result, we find that the nineteenth century provides such hymns as Jane Campbell's 'We plough the fields and scatter', Alford's (1810–1871) 'Come ye thankful people, come' and St. Hill Bourne's (1846–1929) 'The sower went forth sowing'. 'We plough the fields and scatter' is a hymn of praise and thanks, of wonder and adoration, not unlike a children's hymn, and in places closely reminiscent of Mrs. Alexander's 'All things bright and beautiful'. The other two dwell much on the allegory of the earthly and heavenly harvest, both of them leading up to the final judgement and the separation of the wheat and tares.

*Hymns Ancient and Modern* in one revision after another steadily increased in popularity until in 1894 it was used in over ten-thousand churches, far outstripping in popularity its two main rivals, the *Hymnal Companion* and *Church Hymns*. Indeed, the only volume comparable in popular esteem was the *Methodist Hymn Book*, which was revised

and extended in 1876. The success of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* owed much to the work of the compiling committee's secretary, Sir H. W. Baker (1821-1877). Baker himself is nowadays remembered only as the author of 'The King of Love my shepherd is'. This hymn possesses neither the simplicity nor the grace of the Scottish Psalter's 'The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want' or George Herbert's 'The God of Love my shepherd is'. It is more florid. Where Herbert writes:

He leads me to the tender grass,  
Where I both feed and rest;  
Then to the streams that gently pass:  
In both I have the best.

Baker has:

Where streams of living waters flow  
My ransomed soul He leadeth;  
And where the verdant pastures grow  
With food celestial feedeth.

Baker's vision is not only more elaborate, it is also more exuberant in lines such as:

And O, what transport of delight  
From Thy pure chalice floweth!

As *Hymns Ancient and Modern* was being introduced, the Church was being assailed by the impact of new knowledge, of Darwin's theory of evolution and the new textual criticism of the Bible. Besides the arid controversies which this situation produced there came from it also at least two fine hymns, S. J. Stone's (1839-1900) 'The Church's one foundation' and E. H. Plumptre's (1821-1891) 'Thy hand, O God, has guided'. In Stone's hymn steadfast faith looks beyond present troubles:

Mid toil and tribulation,  
And tumult of her war,  
She waits the consummation  
Of peace for evermore;

Till with the vision glorious  
Her longing eyes are blest,  
And the great Church victorious  
Shall be the Church at rest.

The mood of this verse moves from the troubled to the serene. Stone is amongst the few who can compare with Charles Wesley in the use of polysyllables. Here a series of polysyllabic rhymes is balanced against a series of simple rhymes, culminating in the very suggestive contrast of the 'Church victorious', exultant but perhaps tired after effort, with the 'Church at rest'. This hymn is also notable for the way in which it makes doctrine so obviously meaningful. This effect is achieved mainly through the simple images which follow close upon each other:

The Church's one foundation  
Is Jesus Christ, her Lord. . . .  
From heaven He came and sought her  
To be His holy bride,  
With His own blood He bought her  
And for her life He died.

Moreover, these are the images of Scripture, hallowed by centuries of use. They might have seemed hackneyed, but they do not; and the reason for this is that these primal images meant something to Stone, and because they did, he can use them with fervour and conviction.

In 'Thy hand, O God, has guided' Plumptre appeals more strongly to history than to doctrine. The stress falls heavily upon the difficulties, 'shadows thick', 'many a day of darkness', 'many a scene of strife', but through such days and scenes:

The faithful few fought bravely,  
To guard the nation's life,  
Their gospel of redemption,  
Sin pardoned, man restored,  
Was all in this enfolded,  
'One Church, one Faith, one Lord'

The last line, with such peculiarly felicitous sentiments for a refrain, in its repetition binds the hymn together. We see its force again as Plumptre turns to his own generation:

And we, shall we be faithless?  
 Shall hearts fail, hands hang down?  
 Shall we evade the conflict,  
 And cast away our crown?  
 Not so; in God's deep counsels  
 Some better thing is stored;  
 We will maintain, unflinching,  
 'One Church, one Faith, one Lord'.

This verse is typical of a more resolute note which entered into later nineteenth-century hymnody, following the somewhat too tender note of writers like Faber. We see it in the emphasis placed on Christian warfare and pilgrimage, in hymns such as J. S. B. Monsell's (1811-1875) 'Fight the good fight', Bishop Walsham How's (1823-1897) 'For all the saints' and 'Soldiers of the Cross', and Sabine Baring-Gould's (1834-1924) 'Through the night of doubt and sorrow' and 'Onward Christian Soldiers'. Monsell's hymn is in long measure (8.8.8.8) but he varies the regularity of the rhythm very effectively by reversing the stress in the initial foot of many of the lines. This gives emphasis, and so also does another device, the internal rhyme in the first line of each verse:

Fight the good fight with all thy might  
 Christ is thy strength, and Christ thy right;  
 Lay hold on life, and it shall be  
 Thy joy and crown eternally.

How also exploits rhythmical variety in 'For all the saints' with its three lines each of ten syllables, rhyming together. This hymn very vividly juxtaposes the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant:

For all the saints who from their labours rest,  
 Who Thee by faith before the world confessed,  
 Thy name, O Jesu, be for ever blest:  
 Alleluia!



Thou wast their rock, their fortress and their might;  
Thou, Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight;  
Thou in the darkness drear their one true light:  
Alleluia!

. . . . .

And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,  
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,  
And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong!  
Alleluia!

. . . . .

But lo, there breaks a yet more glorious day;  
The saints triumphant rise in bright array:  
The King of glory passes on His way.  
Alleluia!

It is, however, to 'Onward, Christian soldiers', that we must look for the most sustained and exalted expression of this new militancy. The Cross is not now a symbol of suffering or even of love; it is the battle standard of God's army:

Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war  
With the cross of Jesus going on before.  
Christ the Royal Master leads against the foe,  
Forward into battle, see, His banners go.

At the name of Jesus Satan's host doth flee;  
On, then, Christian soldiers, on to victory!  
Hell's foundations quiver at the shout of praise:  
Brothers, lift your voices; loud your anthems raise.

Like a mighty army, moves the Church of God,  
Brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod.  
We are not divided, all one body we—  
One in hope and doctrine, one in charity.

Crowns and thrones may perish, kingdoms rise and wane;  
But the church of Jesus constant will remain:  
Gates of hell can never 'gainst that church prevail;  
We have Christ's own promise, and that cannot fail.

Onward, then, ye people, join our happy throng;  
Blend with ours your voices in the triumph song;  
Glory, praise and honour unto Christ the King,  
This through countless ages men and angels sing.  
Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,  
With the Cross of Jesus going on before.

The 11-syllabled line with definite stresses and not least those at beginning and end, the first two lines repeated as a refrain at the end of each verse, the accumulation of military imagery, the skilful placing of emphatic phrases (cf. the beginning of the second and third verses) all combine to give to this hymn a note of determination and assurance unsurpassed in English hymnody.

There were other writers upon whom I could wish to dwell, men like Ellerton (1826-1893) with the confidence of 'The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended' and the new sense of social responsibility in 'Behold us, Lord, a little space', or Bonar (1808-1889) with the quiet acceptance of God's will in 'Thy way, not mine, O Lord' and the search after spiritual strength in 'Here, O my Lord, I see Thee face to face', but the limits of this essay must not be further stretched. Nor must I extend my remarks to our own day beyond a brief note. The twentieth century has not given itself extensively to the writing of hymns, but there have been some notable productions, mainly in connexion with the publication of new hymn-books. Robert Bridges (1844-1930), for instance, translated a number of Latin hymns for his *Yattendon Hymnal*, actually published in 1899, whilst Canon G. W. Briggs (1874-1960) has made his own contribution to *Songs of Praise*, with whose appearance he and Percy Dearmer (1867-1936) had much to do. Another good collection of the present age is the *B.B.C. Hymn Book* (1951). In this will be found such hymns as G. K. Chesterton's (1874-1936) 'O God of earth and altar', Cyril Alington's (1872-1955) 'Good Christian men, rejoice', and some of the hitherto insufficiently recognized work of Bishop Timothy Rees, C.R. (1874-1939). His 'O Crucified

Redeemer' exemplifies his sense of afflicted love and brotherhood in a high sacramental context. Its second verse is typical:

Wherever Love is outraged,  
Wherever Hope is killed,  
Where man still wrongs his brother-man,  
Thy Passion is fulfilled.  
We see Thy writhing figure,  
We see the wounds that bleed  
Where Brotherhood hangs crucified—  
Nailed to the Cross of greed.

In simple metres, diction and imagery the great hymns of the English language have spoken to the minds and hearts of men in generation after generation. They appeal to Christians by their abiding truth of statement, but beyond this they appeal to Christian and non-Christian alike by their revelation of the ways in which man has responded in every age to one of the profoundest apprehensions of his consciousness, his sense of God.

# ENGLISH HYMNS

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Whiting, William (1825–78). Eternal Father, strong to save (1860: revised in *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, 1861).

Williams, William (1717–91). Guide me, O Thou great Jchovah (Welsh 'Arglwydd arwain trwy'r anialwch', 1745; broadsheet translation, 1772).

Winkworth, Catherine (1829–78) (translator). Now thank we all our God (Translation of Rinkart's 'Nun danket alle Gott' in *Lyra Germanica*, 2nd series, 1858).

Wordsworth, Christopher (1807–85). O Lord of heaven and earth and sea (*The Holy Year*, 3rd edition, 1863).

—See the Conqueror mounts in triumph (*The Holy Year*, 1862).

## ALPHABETICAL INDEX OF FIRST LINES

Abide with Me, fast falls the eventide  
 All people that on earth do dwell  
 All things bright and beautiful  
 And can it be that I should gain  
 Art thou weary, art thou languid  
 As pants the hart for cooling streams

As with gladness men of old  
 Awake, my soul, and with the sun  
 Behold us, Lord, a little space  
 Beneath the cross of Jesus  
 Bound upon the accursed tree  
 Bright the vision that delighted  
 Brightest and best of the sons of the  
     morning

Christ, the Lord, is risen today  
 Christian, dost thou see them?  
 Christians, awake! Salute the happy morn  
 Come, let us join our cheerful songs  
 Come, O thou Traveller unknown  
 Come unto Me, ye weary  
 Come we that love the Lord  
 Come, ye thankful people, come  
 Crown Him with many crowns  
 Depth of mercy! Can there be  
 Eternal Father, strong to save  
 Father of mercies, in Thy word  
 Fight the good fight with all thy might  
 For all the Saints who from their labours  
     rest

For ever with the Lord  
 Forth in Thy name, O Lord, I go  
 From Greenland's icy mountains  
 Glorious things of Thee are spoken  
 Glory to Thee my God, this night  
 God is love: let heaven adore Him  
 God is working His purpose out  
 God moves in a mysterious way  
 God of love and truth and beauty

Henry F. Lyte  
 William Kethe  
 C. Frances Alexander  
 Charles Wesley  
 J. Mason Neale  
 Nahum Tate  
     (with N. Brady)  
 William C. Dix  
 Thomas Ken  
 John Ellerton  
 Elizabeth C. Clephane  
 Henry H. Milman  
 Richard Mant  
 Reginald Heber

Charles Wesley  
 J. Mason Neale  
 John Byrom  
 Isaac Watts  
 Charles Wesley  
 William C. Dix  
 Isaac Watts  
 Henry Alford  
 Godfrey Thring  
 Charles Wesley  
 William Whiting  
 Anne Steele  
 J. S. B. Monsell  
 W. Walsham How

James Montgomery  
 Charles Wesley  
 Reginald Heber  
 John Newton  
 Thomas Ken  
 Timothy Rees  
 A. C. Ainger  
 William Cowper  
 Timothy Rees

Good Christian men, rejoice and sing  
 Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah  
 Hail the day that sees Him rise  
 Hail to the Lord's Anointed  
 Hark, hark, my soul; angelic songs are  
 swelling

Hark! my soul, it is the Lord  
 Hark, the glad sound, the Saviour comes  
 Hark! the herald-angels sing  
 Here, O my Lord, I see Thee face to face  
 Hills of the north, rejoice  
 Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty  
 How sweet the name of Jesus sounds  
 I heard the voice of Jesus say  
 Immortal, invisible, God only wise  
 Jerusalem, my happy home  
 Jerusalem the golden  
 Jesu, Lover of my soul  
 Jesu, the very thought of Thee  
 Jesus calls us o'er the tumult  
 Jesus lives! no longer now  
 Jesus shall reign, where'er the sun  
 Jesus, where'er Thy people meet  
 Just as I am—without one plea  
 King of glory, King of peace  
 Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling  
 gloom

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us  
 Let all the world in every corner sing  
 Let us with a gladsome mind  
 Lift up your heads, ye gates of brass  
 Lo! He comes with clouds descending  
 Lord of the worlds above  
 Love Divine, all loves excelling  
 Much in sorrow, oft in woe  
 My God, how endless is Thy love  
 My God, how wonderful Thou art  
 Nearer, my God, to Thee  
 New every morning is the love  
 Now thank we all our God

Cyril A. Alington  
 William Williams  
 Charles Wesley  
 James Montgomery  
 Frederick W. Faber

William Cowper  
 Philip Doddridge  
 Charles Wesley  
 Horatius Bonar  
 Charles E. Oakley  
 Reginald Heber  
 John Newton  
 Horatius Bonar  
 Walter C. Smith  
 'F.B.P.'  
 J. Mason Neale  
 Charles Wesley  
 Edward Caswall  
 C. Frances Alexander  
 Frances E. Cox  
 Isaac Watts  
 William Cowper  
 Charlotte Elliott  
 George Herbert  
 J. H. Newman

James Edmeston  
 George Herbert  
 John Milton  
 James Montgomery  
 Charles Wesley  
 Isaac Watts  
 Charles Wesley  
 H. Kirke White  
 Isaac Watts  
 Frederick W. Faber  
 Sarah F. Adams  
 John Keble  
 Catherine Winkworth

O come, all ye faithful  
 O come and mourn with me awhile  
 O crucified Redeemer  
 O for a heart to praise my God  
 O for a thousand tongues to sing  
 O God of Bethel, by whose hand  
 O God of earth and altar  
 O God our help in ages past  
 O happy band of pilgrims  
 O Jesu, Thou art standing  
 O Jesus, I have promised  
 O Lord of heaven and earth and sea  
 O love that will not let me go  
 O Word of God incarnate  
 O worship the King  
 Oh! for a closer walk with God  
 Once in Royal David's city  
 Onward, Christian soldiers  
 Our blest Redeemer, e'er He breathed  
 Pleasant are Thy courts above  
 Praise, my soul, the King of heaven  
 Praise the Lord, ye heavens adore Him  
 Praise to the Holiest in the height  
 Prayer is the soul's sincere desire  
 Ride on, ride on in majesty  
 Rock of ages, cleft for me  
 Saviour, again to Thy dear name  
 See the Conqueror mounts in triumph  
 Sinners, turn, why will ye die  
 Soldiers of Christ, arise  
 Souls of men, why will ye scatter?  
 Sow in the morn Thy seed  
 Sun of my soul, Thou Saviour dear  
 The Church's one foundation  
 The day Thou gavest, Lord, is ended  
 The God of love my Shepherd is  
 The Head that once was crowned with  
     thorns  
 The King of love my Shepherd is  
 The Lord my pasture shall prepare

Frederick Oakeley  
 Frederick W. Faber  
 Timothy Rees  
 Charles Wesley  
 Charles Wesley  
 Philip Doddridge  
 Gilbert K. Chesterton  
 Isaac Watts  
 J. Mason Neale  
 W. Walsham How  
 John E. Bode  
 Christopher Wordsworth  
 George Matheson  
 W. Walsham How  
 Sir Robert Grant  
 William Cowper  
 C. Frances Alexander  
 Sabine Baring-Gould  
 Harriet Auber  
 Henry F. Lyte  
 Henry F. Lyte  
 John Kempthorne  
 J. H. Newman  
 James Montgomery  
 Henry H. Milman  
 Augustus Toplady  
 John Ellerton  
 Christopher Wordsworth  
 Charles Wesley  
 Charles Wesley  
 Frederick W. Faber  
 James Montgomery  
 John Keble  
 Samuel J. Stone  
 John Ellerton  
 George Herbert  
 Thomas Kelly  
  
 Sir Henry W. Baker  
 Joseph Addison

The Lord will come and not be slow  
 The roseate hues of early dawn  
 The Son of God goes forth to war  
 The sower went forth sowing  
 The spacious firmament on high  
 The voice that breathed o'er Eden  
 There is a book who runs may read  
 There is a fountain filled with blood  
 There is a green hill far away  
 Thine for ever, God of love  
 Throned upon the awful tree  
 Through all the changing scenes of life

Through the night of doubt and sorrow  
 Thy hand, O God, has guided  
 Thy way, not mine, O Lord  
 We give Thee but Thine own  
 We plough the fields and scatter  
 When all Thy mercies, O my God  
 When God of old came down from  
 heaven

When I survey the wondrous cross  
 When our heads are bowed with woe  
 While shepherds watched their flocks by  
 night

Who would true valour see  
 Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim

John Milton  
 C. Frances Alexander  
 Reginald Heber  
 W. St. Hill Bourne  
 Joseph Addison  
 John Keble  
 John Keble  
 William Cowper  
 C. Frances Alexander  
 Mary F. Maude  
 John Ellerton  
 Nahum Tate

(with N. Brady)  
 Sabine Baring-Gould  
 Edward H. Plumptre  
 Horatius Bonar  
 W. Walsham How  
 Jane Campbell  
 Joseph Addison  
 John Keble

Isaac Watts  
 Henry H. Milman  
 Nahum Tate

John Bunyan  
 Charles Wesley



